

5-1924

The Connecticut College Quarterly, Vol. 3 No. 3

Connecticut College

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Recommended Citation

Connecticut College, "The Connecticut College Quarterly, Vol. 3 No. 3" (1924). *Quarterly*. Paper 14.
http://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/studentpubs_quarterly/14

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The Connecticut College Quarterly

May, 1924

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THE CONNECTICUT COLLEGE QUARTERLY

Published by Students of
Connecticut College,
New London, Connecticut

Volume III

May, 1924

Number 3

SOULS ON THE WIND

HAVE you ever sat alone on a night when the blackness is smothering in its density ; when the stars like candles are snuffed out by clouds and all is drowned in the moaning and wailing of the wind ? Wind, a spirit of relentless power, has clutched the world with mighty, tearing hands, ruthless and furious. The trees, a vague, nondescript blur, bend at its command. It tears angrily past houses, shaking them like toys to the very foundations, whines at the windows. Then the first breath of the unseen monster is spent. Silence save for a quivering, a restlessness that fills the night. All nature lies bruised and panting. Far off in a corner of the world I can see him, a black, huge, puffed monster, massing his strength, crouching for his next pounce. Then, swift as breath he comes ; earth and trees bow to his will. The clouds scatter like frightened sheep across the heavens ; the moon, pale and wan, glances through, shines, flings a cape of cloud about her and withdraws. He sings in his passing, this monster, and a lonely, pleading undertone like the sob of the water against the shore, vibrates through the night.

It was doubly lonely now. My thoughts seemed vague and queer, my mind battered and bent as the trees themselves. Wind filled my heart and soul. I thought of it as friendly, kind, whispering to leaves and flowers, ruffling lakes and laughing through the air. I saw it as a maiden of radiant, wind-tossed beauty, riding on night, eyes agleam, hair of raven black. I thought of it as music, wakening earth to song, touching with tapering fingers harp-strings of life long unused, discordant through neglect. Yet through

it all I felt that wailing, pleading cry—monster, woman, music, it was moaning in the night outside and I shivered as one does at the opening of a dark, fearsome cave. So, half-dreamily, half-thoughtfully I sat there and the night gradually misted before my eyes; the sounds were hushed save for a low crying. I lost all feeling, and was falling.

I was adrift, alone in the depths of night. I saw, yet thought and feeling were detached. It was pleasant, this floating in space. The earth floor below, dim, far-off; unreal sky ceiling above, star-studded. Suddenly the light of the stars cooled, a cloud seemed to rise from earth, a whispering of haunting rustles filled the night. I was seized, tossed, whirled — on and on — Dazed, numbed with terror I cowered before it. Then, consciousness returned. The air filled with a moaning, pleading sound. Along the streams of wind were tossed dim shadows of seeming form yet of no discernible substance. I knew they were souls. I reasoned not, but accepted them as such. Lost, wandering souls cringing, bewildered, crying in the night. I watched them, shaken with horror. Torn by the ruthless monster they passed the home of loved ones, they sobbed by the windows. Caught in the boughs of trees they caused them to creak and moan, in their maddening efforts to escape. On they sped — blackened, yet human souls. Tossed on the ocean waves they fell against the shore, their strangled cries mounting to the heavens. For hours it seems I rose on the tide of beating wind. Then again I was falling — falling —

I sat up. The night was bright with stars and moon; the trees straight, proud, were silhouetted against the sky. The air was still with a hushed beauty. I flung open the windows and breathed of the fragrance. A gentle, caressing breeze brushed my cheek. Again that queer sensation stole over me, again I shivered — Was it a thing of evil? In my ears sounded the pleading, the moaning and the sobbing of souls on the wind of night.

THE WEEK

On Monday, I gave him a glance from my eye.
On Tuesday, the glimpse of a smile.
On Wednesday, I carefully stifled a yawn,
To keep him alert at my side.
On Thursday, a rose fell to him from my hair.
On Friday, my hand crept to his.
On Saturday, gently I offered my lips.
But Sunday I gave him my tears.

CRITICISM

IF THERE is one state of mind especially peculiar to students it is that of the tendency to be critical, and often cruelly so. I wonder why this is, and if the cause might not be found in a certain smug complacency.

There are times when we feel that we are at "the top of the world", when we are positive that no task is too great, when in moments of intrepidity we would cheerfully tackle a giant. Christopher Morley said that when he started to work the most difficult problem he had to face was "the unlearning of four college years". College students are protected at every hand; everything — lessons, meals, amusements, — are doled out to them in doses prescribed by experts in each line and are given to them with an admonition to be good or they'll be sent home. It is unfortunate but certainly true that hardships form character. I wonder if we would be so self-satisfied if we were turned out to fight for awhile unprotected? We really know nothing of what goes on outside, — we haven't actually lived; we have done nothing real, seen nothing real. Oh, yes, — we have books which open up worlds in themselves, and on clear nights when the sky is freckled with stars we can look out over the Sound and love it and appreciate beautiful things — but college is not essential for that. Many a college student dislikes reading and merely looking at scenery.

I am very thankful for three things: an appetite, a love of reading, and an equal fondness for the out-of-doors; and as long as there are fields and woods, blue skies, fall leaves, horses, books, and appetites, I wonder at being down-right unhappy. Yet even with these things, there is a vague unrest at seeming to accomplish nothing. We sit on the end of a long pier in the warm spring sunshine and wisely cure the ills of the world while we watch the steamers plowing toward Long Island, and on each steamer are men toiling for a livelihood, — men far beneath us in the social scale, yet men who are really *doing* something, who are really *living*, while we look on with assumed wisdom. If every college student could be forced to get out and work, to live in constant touch with a *real* world rather than in our own little artificial one, some of the superior judgment would quickly vanish, leaving us more prone to smile *with* people and less apt to laugh *at* them.

COLUMBINE

They burn at the tips of their frail stems,
Crimson and gold, like the holy flames of Pentecost ;—
Or quick on the breath of the wind they break into dance,
Mad like a Mediaeval jester,
Cap and bells shaking and tinkling with mirth.

BASIS FOR BELIEF

EVERY man's belief outstrips his demonstration. Faith motivates our acts and cogitations, for assumptions as premises are indispensable to the reasoning process. Reason, therefore, seems to carry with it a congenital taint, namely the infinite series of accepted propositions upon which any given opinion rests. In acting we must exercise deliberation, but not too much of it, because complete understanding of meanings is impossible of attainment. Life will not wait on proof, although it unfolds all too rapidly and catastrophically before the most timid advance upon it, sometimes overwhelming us with unguessed consequences.

Added to this theoretical tentativeness and hazard is the clean testimony of history, science, and philosophy that changing winds of doctrine blow from all and from opposite directions with baffling rapidity and disconcerting contrariness. Experience, the condition of knowledge and of controlled personality, is also the locus of scepticism. It saves and it damns. It is our sole source of guidance in all practical affairs, while incapable of yielding the faith which sustains weakness and nourishes resolve. It provides information without which men cannot live, but it is utterly barren of affirmation, confident without dogmatism, by which men can die. Experience whether as history or science is also silent regarding the terminal of our surging thrust into the natural order; every acquisition clamors insatiably for others in weary infinity. We stand aghast at the unending; when men believe that achievement and peace are everlastingly in prospect, effort changes from glory to horror. And rightly, for it is then hopeless, an *ignis fatuus*, a mocking lure. A modern novelist perceiving the trap of nature, proposes at least to sport with his fate:

"I'll turn my noose to tight-rope use
And madly dance upon it."

Madness is characteristically an analgaesic.

The present period is assuredly without faith; of that sea we hear only "the melancholy, long, withdrawing roar". This is not to be wholly regretted. Faith is weak because faith was false, and because experience and reason have revealed that falsity. It is idealism and logical rectitude of the human mind rather than its insensitiveness or vulgarity which destroyed faith in ancestral institutions. Not one jot or tittle of this disintegrating doubt can we afford to surrender: for hope of increased self-consciousness lies only in incorporating its demands into new formulae.

II

It seems, therefore, that belief must be directed toward other objects and other values than those of the empirical world if it is to have strength and per-

manence sufficient for an unfaltering guide. It must possess unconditional and necessary objects in order to avoid endless dubiety. Anything short of this requirement results in opportunism and the wavering of purpose. Such objects of belief are certainly not of the senses, for sense allows none but contingent truths and instrumental values, never absolute truths nor final values. We suspect experience of insolvency because it will never issue the metals securing its promissory notes; and indefinitely extended promises are worthless. The object of belief must be a present cash value and it must be clear to the believer that he now reaps the satisfactions of truth and contentment for which he yearns. With out this he is committed to a search as mad as it is foredoomed; he is barred from affirmations, from heroism, dignity, nobility. Sceptism has no heroes.

We will take cash and let the credit go if coin of the realm can be found. Religions have claimed knowledge of this realm, declaring it to be the kingdom of heaven, "where virtue and honor, wisdom and truth abide, *aeterna corpora*, subject to no change." Rejecting sense as the locus of value and of man's true home, it has offered peace through identification with what is not ephemeral, through form as the meaning of the absolute. Being and truth have their laws in accordance with which the structure of knowledge is made and remade; virtue is a form, a law of personal existence; government and civilization are also functional and not static concepts. Form is the pattern of whatever is. The lust for being is an absolute to which experience furnishes contingent truths and desires. The laws of being are what we seek, and they are the same as the laws of form.

III

In the laws of form we can repose unlimited confidence because they are laws of being. Their demands account for the logical and moral struggle. If we can be at all, and yet be false or vicious, no reasoning can convert from folly or entice us from vice if folly and vice accord with our desires. But because we desire form, and because our integrity is proportional to our embodiment of it we seek after it incessantly. Falsity is in all strictness unintelligibility and nonentity. In this profound sense whatever is, is truth. To falter in living the truth is to disintegrate, to become nothing, to destroy personality, and to paralyze action. The quantity of mind we possess is the scope of our logical structure. The alternative to an absolute criterion of truth is not a system of thought called sceptism, but no system at all. The contingency of natural knowledge is the best witness to the existence of an arbiter, autocratic, absolute, and reasonable. With sceptics we need not debate; enough to remind them that they have a world; let it be a dream world if it please them.

All credit is due to Plato because he first saw the moral law as the inseparable postulate of personal existence, as its form. We are social, he said, and cannot elude the will to cherish our fellows. We are self-conscious only in society, and we can never have our will save us through justice. But, while virtue is form, it is utterly fatuous to seek form without content: truth needs its object, virtue its occasion, beauty its medium, civilization its institutions and monuments. Form, the simple, welcomes infinite complexity of politics, and economics in order thereby to manifest and indicate itself. The more complex the embodiment the more self-conscious the virtue.

Democracy is form. It is not the senate, nor the president, nor the sixteenth amendment. These are but to express a purpose, to give flesh to a spirit. Democracy is a mode of procedure, not any limited body of ordinances. There are those who do not know this, and who destroy the form by resulting to violence. The value of democracy lies in its embodiment of principles which experience can neither prove or disprove. It is not on trial, though the present paraphernalia of its embodiment is and must be.

Civilization cannot be found in a multitude of appliances which villainy can pervert to its own purposes. It is a way of regarding those appliances — a form. It is inseparable from a material basis, but consists in regarding material as adjectival, and not as substantive. It uses science and nature, and is essentially such a mode of use. Social intercourse struggles to obey the laws of form, reducing the disordered and therefore the crude, to refinement and delicacy. Civilization is the least superficial of all man's achievement; it is no veneer, but a truth telling.

Therefore, it seems to me, we can find new uses and new glories for science and history in causing them to convey and illustrate the absolute. The sensory world is the extensive opportunity for the affirmation of high resolve, the material for our artistic fashioning. Sense gives no basis for belief, but it does provide its workshop and occasion. What we mean by opportunity is only the possibility of giving body to form.

A FAIRY RING

I saw a fairy ring today—
The first I've ever seen.
It was dried red grass
Gathered close about a tall gray stone.
If I stole down the hill tonight
To watch my fairy ring

Would I see dancing circles
Of laughing elves and fays?
No, there'd be no brown folk there—
Only a round moon silvering
A quiet river and a windless hill—
Only the round moon — and me
Hunched crosslegged on the gray rock.

MINNIE

ONE might divide people into three classes : gentles, folks, and characters. The last two may be found in either of the first two groups, and yet they are so markedly individual that they deserve a separate category. Minnie is in class B, folks, subdivision A, characters. By profession, Minnie washes dishes in the faculty kitchen, sweeps the dining-rooms, and waters the plants. Unofficially, however Minnie is a boss to be feared, a coquette to be flirted with, and a child to be humored.

Minnie is small of stature and large of substance. Her favorite joke, when her mood calls for jokes, is "If you rolled me out, how tall would I be?" Her large head is covered with curly reddish hair not yet tinged with gray. Saucer blue eyes stare forth above flushed cheeks. These eyes can roll when there are salads, pop when there are both salads and soups, and droop when the glasses number over thirty-one. When her happy smile parts her cupid's bow mouth, tiny pearly teeth shine forth. In fact, if you just imagine away the years and weight that unkind time has piled on Minnie, you can see her blooming as the original "Wild Irish rose" of which she fondly sings.

Minnie is a woman of moods, or rather, a child of caprice. The little tyrant at the dish pan has a line as well developed as that of any modern flapper. If the mood is sad, gloom rests upon the faculty kitchen and waitresses dare not smile while Minnie enjoys ill health. Who could be cheerful in the face of Minnie's indigestion which won't let her eat a bite, or her back which is broken from leaning over her work? It is on these sad days that she berates our healthy appetites. It seems to be the Almighty's joke on Minnie that, while she never tastes a mouthful, her bulk increases steadily. Other days, the mood is cross and we walk on our tiptoes. A sudden, snapped order to "put that chair away" is promptly, wordlessly obeyed. Then Minnie, from her throne of superiority, somewhat mollified by the taste of domineering, announces her kitchen motto: "A place for everything and everything in it's place." Her neck will stiffen, her eyes will roll, and if our response is

submissive, perhaps the domestic storm will clear away and Minnie's rippling, cheery laugh will augur the happy change. Now, the gay mood! The little kitchen will hardly hold its crew when the gay mood animates Minnie. Her jokes, her songs, her dances, her swiftly adopted slang, all are brought forward for our applause. And we give it readily. Who wouldn't? With the address of a one-man vaudeville show, Minnie progresses through her repertoire, following each completed number by cuddling her head back between her plump shoulders and giving out her shrill, whole-hearted, tinkling laugh.

"The world's funniest woman," Minnie loves to call herself, and the world's funniest woman she is. It is a job in itself to work with her, but the pay is high, the acquirement of exquisite tact in dealing with human nature. I mentioned to one of my co-workers that I intended to tell about Minnie in four pages. She answered, "You couldn't do it completely in four hundred!" Nor could I. Minnie is too much for us all with her sullen silences, her brilliant witticisms, and her simple childishness. We love her, because in a world of too many drab people, our Minnie is a character.

BALLAD OF MODERN YOUTH

A maiden fair as fair could be
Was dainty Isobel;
Her hair was golden in the sun,
In luscious waves it fell.

(But oh, the wondrous golden hue
Was of peroxide stain,
And the waves looked very sure
They could not stand the rain.)

Now this fair maid quite often went
Her milk white steed to ride;
The twain a bit of beauty lent
To the green countryside.

(Her steed indeed was milky white,
And gentle too, per force.
There surely was no need for fright
On such a gentle horse.)

Now near unto the college grounds,
Where Isobel did bide,
A lonely wood was to be found,
Where she was wont to ride.

Now near unto this deep green wood
A farmer lad did bide ;
And oft he had enthralled stood
To see the fair maid ride.

Now in the wood, there was a ledge,
Both very steep and fell,
And at its base a little brook
Did tinkle like a bell.

One day the maid came riding by,
When it began to rain,
And though she urged her steed to fly,
Her efforts all were vain.

Then suddenly, a bumblebee
The steed's rear flank did sting.
Therewith it fled towards the ledge
As fast as anything.

Nor logs nor stones could make it stop ;
Nor at the edge it shrank ;
Right over it — it went — ker flop
And in black mire sank.

Poor Isobel right roundly cursed
Her vile, unseemly luck ;
To her it seemed of things the worst
Thus to be stuck in muck.

But ah ! A knight comes riding by,
(In overalls he's clad.)
"Oh, help me out," the maiden cries !
(It is the farmer lad.)

"Ah, that I will," the hero quoth,
 "Be but my own true love."
 "Why, as to that, I'm nothing loath,"
 Replied the maid above.

With all his might, the farmer boy
 Did pull and tug and yank,
 Until the steed and maiden coy,
 Were safe upon the bank.

No sooner had she reached dry shore
 Then she did laugh and jeer,
 "Farewell, I'll never see thee more."
 Said he, "Aren't maidens queer."

BY A FIRE

CROSS-LEGGED on a pine-wood floor in front of a roaring log-fire, I sat watching the shadowy flame playing ring-around-a-rosy. Don's low voice just about reached me across the five feet separating us. She was reading from Kahlil Gibran. With the crackling and the pop pop of the fire I heard:

"A seeker of silences am I, and what treasure have I found in silences that I may dispense with confidence?" . . .

"Your joy is your sorrow unmasked. And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears. And how else can it be? The deeper sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain. Is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was hollowed with knives? When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy."

I crept closer to the fire. It popped and crackled unobtrusively, now. It too was enthralled by the witchery of a modern master who had eluded the trap of his times, a trap bated for the inartistic majority. . . .

"Your pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding." . . . "No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge." . . . "Thought is a bird of space, that in a cage of words may indeed unfold its wings but cannot fly."

Just an occasional pop now. Silvery paths from the moon appeared close to me,— drinking in the soft cadences, too, I suppose. Even the chant of the train across the river, its reiterated “come — come — comewithme, comewithme, comewithme” had ceased to make any impression on my consciousness.

“But let there be spaces in your togetherness, and let the winds of the heavens dance between you.”

“Let the winds, . . .” I wondered. Did he too recognize that man is essentially concerned with his own ego? Don’s voice ceased to hold me; I had drifted away on my own skiff of dreams.— Is it strange that we should feel constrained in attempting to express ourselves, our inmost self? After all, people aren’t really interested.— People study others so they may better know themselves. Or perhaps it’s their vanity that likes to keep well nourished.— It is easy to create characteristics in another which, chimerical as they are, can hold our interest.— Oh well, anyway, the world is like a puppy dog running after its own tail.— I laughed, staggered to my feet, freed myself from the spell with one jerk, and stumbled up the road to my bunk. In two minutes I was in my cot with the train’s “come — come — comewithme, comewithme, comewithme” again mocking my ears.

A POEM

As waves roll up across a sandy beach
So hope beats pulsingly within my heart.
On clear days with a brisk wind blowing
The billows hurry after one another,
Eager to break and flood the placid shore.
Then am I filled with a joyous vigor;
Then can I leap to the cliffs high above;
Hurl, from their towering steeps, great boulders
And laugh to watch them make the spray spring up
In vain attempt to kiss the golden heights.
But soon the waves recede in ebbing-tide,
Baring the beach to a merciless sun,
And quietly hope creeps into hiding,
Leaving life pale,— uncolored as the sand.

BACK DROPS

Noisy straggling in of students to the cold bare gymnasium
 Ropes and dumbbells on the walls — some dumbbells in the seats
 Several faculty looking religious in hopes of quieting the impetuous
 Youth surrounding them

lack-robed seniors — black-robed choir somewhat filling up the
 Ghastly emptiness

Hymns and prayers—readings, sermon—Restlessness as the hour grows long
 Heavy-lidded choir girls striving to keep awake
 Hymn books dropped and squeaking chairs.

Friday night, and the swans are happy in their hoops
 Fish at college
 Steak at the Tea House
 Freshmen waitresses aiming to please
 Open fireplace — sometimes glowing

Coffee, doughnuts and cider in the fall

One girl with a man over in the corner
 Rapturous gazing at one another
 What are they eating? They do not know and we can not see.

Crowded room — silence — dark shades pulled down — drowsiness
 Girls apparently attentive — minds wandering from spring wardrobes to

The Only Man

Crafty girls writing letters when they should be taking notes
 Tennyson on love of home
 Tennyson on humble folk
 Tennyson on love of beauty
 Tennyson Ah! at his best on strong belief in God and Immortality
 Faithfully interpreted by an enthusiastic professor
 Many gestures, declarations, many bringing home of points by pounding
 On the desk

Loud scraping of chairs in Room above
 Closing of books, pens and notebooks
 Dreamers “coming to” with sudden starts

Professor in cheerless tone “We will take that up next time”

Dim lights and quiet girls

Silence, expectancy

Prexy reading ; grave and thoughtful

Poems we love — atmosphere of softness — beauty seldom found in college
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